

Author of paper :

Dr. sc. Salmedin Mesihović

Full professor for ancient and classical civilisation

Department of history and Chair of archaeology

Philosophy Faculty

University of Sarajevo

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Battle near Volcaean marshes 7. AD

- Episode from Great Illyrian Uprising -

In his narrative of the Great Illyrian Uprising, Cassius Dio mentions (LV, 32) battle „near the Volcaean marshes“: τοῦ δὲ δὴ Γερμανικοῦ ἐς τὴν Παννονίαν ἐλθόντος καὶ στρατευμάτων πολλαχόθεν ἐκεῖσε συνιόντων, τηρήσαντες οἱ Βάτωνες τὸν Σεουήρον ἐκ τῆς Μυσίας προσιόντα ἐπέπεσον αὐτῷ ἀπροσδόκητοι, στρατοπεδευομένῳ πρὸς τοῖς Οὐολκαίοις ἔλεσι, καὶ τοὺς μὲν ἔξω τοῦ ταφρεύματος ἐφόβησαν καὶ κατήραξαν ἐς αὐτό, δεξαμένων δέ σφας τῶν ἔνδον ἡττήθησαν. („After Germanicus reached Pannonia and armies were assembling there from many sides, the two Batos waited until Severus approached from Moesia and then fell upon him unexpectedly, while he was encamped near the Volcaean marshes. They frightened the pickets outside the ramparts and drove them back inside, but when the men in the camp stood their ground, the attackers were defeated. “). Cassius Dio's account of battle „near the Volcaean marshes“ is in the context of an account of the events that took place in the consular year of Quintus Cecilius Metellus Creticus Silanus and Aulus Licinius Nerva Sillianus, in the 7th year AD, immediately after the affair with Agrippa Postumus and the mention of the arrival of Germanicus with reinforcements in Pannonia, and before the talk of minor anti-insurgency offensives and Germanicus' victory over illyrian nation Mazaeci at today north-western Bosnia.

Although Velleius Paterculus does not mention Volcaean marshes in his draft narrative of the Great Illyrian Uprising, he describes (CXII, 1, 4 - 6) a battle which, judging by the details given, is the same one that Cassius Dio calls the battle near the Volcaean marshes : *At ea pars, quae obviam se effuderat exercitui, quem A. Caecina et Silvanus Plautius consulares ex transmarinis adducebant provinciis, circumfusa quinque legionibus nostris auxiliaribusque ei equitatus regio (quippe magnam Thracum manum iunctus praedictis ducibus Rhoemetalces, Thraciae rex, in adiutorium eius belli secum trahebat) paene exitiabilem omnibus cladem intulit: 5 fusa regionum equestres acies, fugatae alae, conversae cohortes sunt, apud signa quoque legionum trepidatum. Sed Romani virtus militis plus eo tempore vindicavit gloriae quam ducibus reliquit, qui multum a more imperatoris sui discrepantes ante in hostem inciderunt, quam per exploratores, ubi hostis esset, cognoscerent. Iam igitur in dubiis rebus semet ipsae legiones adhortatae, 6 iugulatis ab*

hoste quibusdam tribunis militum, interempto praefecto castrorum praefectisque cohortium, non incruentis centurionibus, e quibus etiam primi ordinis cecidere, invasere hostes nec sustinuisse contenti perrupta eorum acie ex insperato victoriam vindicaverunt. („But the division of their forces which had swarmed out to meet the army which the consulars Aulus Caecina and Silvanus Plautius were bringing up from the provinces across the sea, surrounded five of our legions, together with the troops of our allies and the cavalry of the king (for Rhoemetalces, king of Thrace, in conjunction with the aforesaid generals was bringing with him a large body of Thracians as reinforcements for the war), and inflicted a disaster that came near being fatal to all. 5 The horsemen of the king were routed, the cavalry of the allies put to flight, the cohorts turned their backs to the enemy, and the panic extended even to the standards of the legion. But in this crisis the valour of the Roman soldier claimed for itself a greater share of glory than it left to the generals, who departing far from the policy of their commander, had allowed themselves to come into contact with the enemy before they had learned through their scouts where the enemy was. 6 At this critical moment, when some tribunes of the soldiers had been slain by the enemy, the prefect of the camp and several prefects of cohorts had been cut off, a number of centurions had been wounded, and even some of the centurions of the first rank had fallen, the legions, shouting encouragement to each other, fell upon the enemy, and not content with sustaining their onslaught, broke through their line and wrested a victory from a desperate plight.“). Velleius Paterculus's information about this battle is also in the context of the presentation of events that could be dated to the 7th year AD, after a presentation on how the insurgents established themselves on Claudius Mountain (probably today's Central Slavonian hilly - mountain massif Psunj - Papuk - Krndija - Dilj) and before talking about the affair of Agrippa Postumus.

Both narratives do not contain contradictions, but complement each other, with Velleius's narrative giving significantly more details. We do not know the sources for the origin of Velleius's and Dio's narratives. Velleius Paterculus was in Illyricum at the time of this battle, but situated on the western front, in the wider area of roman stronghold and town Siscia, and was not a direct eyewitness or participant in the battle. He received possible information about the battle from contemporaries, other participants in the battle or because he read official reports about it, and perhaps someone also compiled a historical work with a description of the battle. Dio's narrative is more general, more concise without Velleius's rhetorical figures and criticism of the roman commanders-in-chief in that battle with the inevitable praise of Tiberius, but essentially does not call into question any specific Velleius's information. Cassius Dio used some already published literary source for information about the battle „near Volcaean marshes“, but apparently it was not Velleius's narrative about this battle because he did not mention it.

On *Tabula Peutingeriana* (VI, 2) there is a recorded locality of *pont. Ulcae*, between *Ad Basante* (somewhere on river Bosut in today's region Western Syrmia) and *Murse Maior* (actually on the way to this settlement, east or rather southeast of it about 12 roman miles = about 18 km). This would place the battle „near Volcaean marshes“ further to the east, and in that case it would take place at the very beginning of the movement of the troops of Caecina and Silvanus. This would in some way confirm the determination position of *pont. Ulcae*, because judging by the distances

presented on *Tabula Peutingeriana*, pont. *Ulcae* was 45 roman miles (cc 67 km) west of town Syrmia, which would then correspond to middle courses of the rivers Bosut and Vuka (in today's Croatian part of region Syrmia). The unknown author of *Epitome de Caesaribus* (41, 5) mentions a lake called *Hiulca* near the town of Cibala (today's Vinkovci in Croatia, western Syrmia), which would correspond exactly to the mentioned middle courses of the rivers Bosut and Vuka. River Vuka was known in antiquity as *Volcos*.

There is also a linguistic coincidence between Dio's Volcaean marshes and the Celtic nation *Volcae* (in Julius Caesar, *de bell. Gall.* VI, 24 --- Ουονλκαί in Ptolemy and Strabo). It would not be impossible to assume that the Volcaean marshes are a linguistic testimony to the fact that some branch of this great Celtic people settled at late iron age in southeast Pannonia, or that it at least dominated for some time. Perhaps these marshes were also the site of battles between Constantine and Licinius a little more than 300 years later. All this would suggest that these wetlands were situated in an important geographical, perhaps even traffic position.

Sources and literature

Claudii Ptolemaei Geographia. 3 vols., ed. Nobbe, C. F. A., Leipzig: Carolus Tauchnitus.

Dio Cassius, Roman History, Volume VI: Books 51 - 55, Cary, Earnest - Foster, Herbert B., LCL.

Gaj Julije Cezar, Galski rat, Ahmed Tuzlić, Novi Sad: MS

Pseudo-Aurelius Victor, Epitome de Caesaribus, Leipzig: edd. F. Pichlmayr i R. Gruendel.

Strabo, Geography, Volume VII: Books 15-16, Jones, Horace Leonard, LCL.

Tabula Peutingeriana, Monumenta cartographica Jugoslaviae, I antičke karte, Posebna izdanja knj. 17, Gavro A. Škrivanić, Beograd : Istorijski institut

Velleius Paterculus, Compendium of Roman History, Frederick W. Shipley, LCL.

Gračanin Hrvoje, Illyricum of the 2. and 3. centuries AD in the works of Latin and Greek historians, *Illyrica antiqua*, FF press, p. 287 – 298, Zagreb 2005.

Mesihović Salmedin, Bitka za Ilirik, Udruženje za proučavanje i promoviranje ilirskog naslijeđa i drevnih klasičnih civilizacija BATHINVS, Sarajevo 2018.

Mirković, Miroslava, *Rimska država u doba principata i dominata (27. pre Hr.-337. n.e.)*, *Od Avgusta do Konstantina*, Beograd: Dosije 2003.

Šašel Kos Marjeta, Appian and Illyricum, *Situla 43*, Narodni muzej Slovenije, Ljubljana 2005.

Zaninović Marin, Breuci od Sirmija do Marsonije, *Op. Arch.* 27, p. 443 – 449, Zagreb 2003.